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Textual Suggestions on Isa. 2⁶ 66³, Zeph. 2^{2.5}

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ISAIAH 2⁶

THE difficulty is in the last word **יִשְׁפִּיקוּ**. It used to be connected with **שֹׁפֵק** *Qal*, to be plenty, many; *Hi.*, to have plenty, to have a great number. But this view is abandoned by most, though not by all, scholars.¹ Most recent critics derive it from **שֹׁפֵק** = **סָפַק** "to strike," and change **וּבְיָדָיו** to **וּבְיָדָיו**, translating "and they strike hands with foreigners." But this is not quite satisfactory either, for the idea of foreign alliances is not in the context. The verse speaks of divination (read **מִקְדָּם** for **מִקְדָּם**) and sooth-saying. If foreign intercourse were given as the reason for the prevalence of these magic and mantic practices, it would have been brought out more clearly and the connection would have been indicated in some way.² We expect rather that the thought of the beginning of the verse should be developed still further, especially when we see that in vs. 8 there are three clauses used to express the one thought of idolatry. Since "the children of foreigners" are parallel to the "Philistines" of the previous clause, we look for a

¹ Thus, *e.g.*, Whitehouse in the *New Century Bible on Isaiah*, 1905, translates "are crowded with."

² Besides, the expression **שֹׁפֵק בִּיד** in the sense of "striking hands with" for the purpose of an alliance is unusual and occurs only in this conjecture. Usually the phrase runs **סָפַק כַּפַּיִם** "to clap one's hands" either in anger (Num. 24¹⁰), or in mockery (Lam. 2¹⁵ Job 27²³). Of course, this does not imply that **שֹׁפֵק בִּיד** may not have been a good Hebrew phrase, but only that we cannot control it. The Arabic *safaqa* has the meaning "strike (hands)" as well as "slap (the face)" and *safqatun* is the term used in bargaining for the *hand-clasp* that seals the bargain.

parallel of עֲנָנִים in יִשְׁפִּיקוּ. And it seems therefore very likely that the original text read instead of

וּבְיָלְדֵי נְכָרִים יִשְׁפִּיקוּ
וּבְיָלְדֵי נְכָרִים יִכְשְׁפוּ

“For they are full of divination,
and are soothsayers like the Philistines,
and *practice sorcery* as the children of foreigners.”

ISAIAH 66 3

It is generally acknowledged that we need some participle before דָּם in the clause מַעֲלֶה מִנְחָה דָּם-חֵוִיר. Usually נֶסֶךְ is supplied. But it is not easy to see how this could have been omitted, and the whole structure of the verse speaks against it. It appears to me more probable that the text had originally מְרִים which was misread דָּם. The structure of the verse favors it; it is strictly parallel to מַעֲלֶה. Compare Lev. 22 15 for רוּם in the sense of “offer, sacrifice.”

The verse then reads,

“He that killeth an ox is as he that slayeth a man,
he that sacrificeth a lamb as he that breaketh a dog’s neck,
he that bringeth an oblation as *he that offereth* a swine,
he that burneth frankincense as he that blesseth an idol.”

ZEPHANIAH 2 2

The first line in Zeph. 2 2 בְּמָרָם לָדֶת חֶק בְּמֶזֶן עֶבֶר יוֹם is translated by LXX *πρὸ τοῦ γενέσθαι ὑμᾶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος παραπορευόμενον*. It will be noted that in this translation the difficult words לָדֶת חֶק are omitted, for *τοῦ γενέσθαι* cannot seriously be regarded as representing an original reading, תְּהִי or לֹא תְהִי. Evidently the Greek translators did not know what to do with לָדֶת חֶק and so translated the text very freely in order to get some good meaning out of it; and, of course, their translation does make sense. But there was another difficulty in the text. They had translated בְּמֶזֶן עֶבֶר by *ὡς ἄνθρωπος παραπορευόμενον* i.e. כְּצֶעַן עֶבֶר. There was, however, another word left, יוֹם. What should they do with it? Nothing remained but to omit it also. It is evi-

dent that the LXX reading is guesswork and not to be taken into consideration for the reconstruction of the original text.³

The context makes it quite clear that the general meaning must be "Get you shame and be ye ashamed,⁴ O nation unabashed,⁵ before" *it is too late!*⁶ This suggests the reading חק בְּמָרָם בְּלוֹת "before the appointed time *is at an end!*" The only change is in לָדָת which must be read בְּלוֹת. For חק in the sense of "prescribed limit of time" compare Job 14 5. 13. For the construction of בְּמָרָם with the infinitive compare not only לָדָת בְּמָרָם but also מְטָרָם שׁוּם אֶבֶן Hag. 2 15.⁷

The following clause כִּמְעַן עֵבֶר יוֹם is probably still dependent on בְּמָרָם and to be translated "before the appointed time is at an end, [before] the day has passed as chaff,"⁸ when you might have repented and by repentance averted the doom.

But the simile of flying chaff is used as a rule to illustrate the idea of scattering rather than that of swiftness. And so a suggestion may be made on this clause, with all due reserve, for it is perhaps unnecessary to suspect the Massoretic text. It would seem not unlikely that the text read originally for

כִּמְעַן עֵבֶר יוֹם
כִּי מֵאֵץ לְעֵבֶר יוֹם

"for the day hastens, urges, to pass by." For the use of the

³ This is a beautiful illustration of the way in which the Greek translators would try to make an untranslatable passage intelligible. It is a very keen guess and certainly brings out in general the meaning that the prophet had intended. We may adopt their guess, if we please, but must not translate the Greek into Hebrew and then think that we have restored the original Hebrew text.

⁴ Reading הִתְקַשְׁשׁוּ וְנִבְשׁוּ for הִתְבּוֹשְׁשׁוּ וְנִבְשׁוּ with Graetz, Cheyne *et al.*

⁵ "Abashed" is the probable though not certain meaning of נִבְשָׁה. Was it originally נָכַר *Ni.* כָּפַה, "bowed down, humbled" ?

⁶ So also LXX.

⁷ The construction of בְּמָרָם with a noun may also be compared, בְּמָרָם קִיץ before the harvest, Is. 28 4, בְּמָרָם בֹּקֶר before the morning, Is. 17 14.

⁸ Compare RV

Hiphil compare Is. 22 4.⁹ The verb expresses the urgent haste; the time presses. Repent, soon it will be too late!

The whole would then read,

Get you shame and be ye ashamed,

O nation unabashed!

Before the appointed time is at an end,

For the day hastens quickly by.

Before there come upon you

The fierce anger of Jahve.

ZEPHANIAH 2 5

The phrase **בְּנֵי אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים**, "Canaan, the land of the Philistines," is so unusual that it arouses suspicion, even though the Versions have the same text. Wellhausen, Nowack, Marti, and Fagnani¹⁰ omit **בְּנֵי** from the text as secondary. But there must be some explanation for its presence in the text of the Massoretes and of the Versions. Why should somebody have introduced it and incidentally have rearranged the text, transposing "the land of the Philistines" from the end of the verse to its present position?

It is more likely that the text read originally for

**בְּנֵי
בֵּי יִצְחָק**

"for the land of the Philistines *shall be afflicted*,
and I will destroy thee [originally: it (?)], that there shall
be no inhabitant."

⁹ Possibly the Qal **אָץ** was used, though that is not so likely.

¹⁰ C. P. Fagnani, *The Structure of the Text of the Book of Zephaniah* in the Harper Memorial Volumes, II, p. 266.